

- Hinchey, Hall Help House Pass Medicare Improvement for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 - Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Congressman John Hall (D-NY) today helped the House pass the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008. The measure prevents the pending 10 percent payment reduction for physicians in Medicare, enhances Medicare preventive and mental health benefits, improves and extends programs for low-income Medicare beneficiaries, and extends expiring provisions for rural and other providers. "This measure helps expand the level of coverage Americans receive through Medicare and ensures doctors and pharmacists get paid fairly from Medicare so that they can continue provide care and services to all those on Medicare," Hinchey said. "I am very pleased that this bill also focuses on providing coverage for preventative care, mental health care, and those who live in rural areas of the country like parts of upstate New York." "Doctors and patients all across the Hudson Valley tell me how concerned they are about Medicare cuts," said Hall. "A doctor in Yorktown today told me that he feared a physician payment cut would mean he couldn't afford to treat Medicare patients. Doctors shouldn't be prevented from doing their jobs and patients shouldn't have to leave their family doctors. This bill will help everyone by removing the 10 percent cut for doctors and providing a 1.1 percent update in physician payments for 2009."

Hinchey and Hall supported the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 for a variety of reasons including the fact that the bill stops the pending 10 percent cut in Medicare payments to physicians for the remainder of 2008 and increase physician payments by 1.1 percent for 2009. It also provides a 2 percent quality reporting bonus for doctors who report on quality measures through 2010 and provides financial incentives to providers to encourage the use of electronic prescribing technology.

The bill extends and improves low-income assistance programs for Medicare beneficiaries whose income is below \$14,040. It would increase the amount of assets that low-income beneficiaries can have and still qualify for financial help with Medicare costs. The bill also adds new preventive benefits to the Medicare program and reduces beneficiary out of pocket costs for mental health care.

In an effort to support pharmacies, the bill requires Medicare Advantage plans to pay pharmacies promptly (within 14 days) and update the prices they will reimburse for prescription medicines at least weekly so the pharmacies know what they should get paid. The bill also delays the new Medicaid payment rule which changes Medicaid's payment limits for pharmacies to be based on the Average Manufacturer Price (AMP).

Hinchey and Hall said that the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 also focuses on protecting access to care in rural America by extending and building upon expiring provisions, including: improving payments for sole community hospitals, critical access hospitals, and ambulances; extending expiring provisions that preserve payment equity for rural physicians and rural hospitals that run clinical laboratories; and increasing access to tele-health services and speech-language therapy.

The bill also takes steps to reduce Medicare payments to President Bush-backed private plans

which are being paid more than 100 percent of the cost to treat a beneficiary in fee-for-service Medicare.

-30-